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Translation

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"die strasse" (the street)

Illustrated Weekly

No. 42, Hamburg, October 15, 1950

This is how Raeder is living at Spandau

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More severe than in a penitentiary

Fear of the "Russian month"

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Grand Admiral Dr.h.c. Erich Raeder did not move a muscle when Justice Lawrence read out the sentence in the big hall of the Nuremberg Law Courts. He found it hard, although, due to the long practice of a soldier's life, he was accustomed to conceal his feelings before strangers. Imprisonment for life! Raeder had not expected such a sentence. He had counted upon an acquittal.

Raeder did not understand any more. He did not understand this court which was trying him, he did not understand the laws under which they proceeded, and which were not yet in existence when, in the year 1943, he had retired from service and left his post as head of the German navy to Dönitz. He did not understand the treatment, either, which was applied to him, an old professional soldier, who throughout his long life had not committed anything in violation of honour and law.

Raeder wheeled and left the court-room in the midst of two American M.P.men with their white helmets. It caused him pain to hold himself up. A life-long prison term, he thought on his way through the long corridors to his cell. How many years would this mean for him? In six months he would attain the age of seventy years. An Admiral of the Fleet would then celebrate his seventieth birthday, it suddenly occurred to him, and he thought of the numerous birthday celebrations of his superiors in the Imperial Navy and in the Republic of Weimar.

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There was no court of appeal in these proceedings - thus it was laid down in the new law which had been made for him. He could submit a petition for pardon only, as his defence counsel had advised him. Raeder wrote a petition for pardon. He asked for the favour, he wrote, to be shot, as it might become a soldier who has done his duty all his life over. But they did not know any pardon. His petition was turned down.

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Raeder began to serve his sentence already at Nuremberg. All privileges, which up to that time he had enjoyed as a remand prisoner, were cancelled. It took still some time to adapt the prison of Spandau in such a way that the seven convicts of Nuremberg, amongst them Grand Admirals Raeder and Dönitz as the only soldiers, could be quartered there. During this time the cell-door was once again opened to let in strange visitors who did not belong to the management of the prison. A delegation of officers of the British navy entered the room. They made a statement. For the last time Raeder heard a language which he understood and with which he was well familiar. In the British navy, thus it was said in the statement, they are discountenancing the verdict against the German Grand Admiral, in particular on the account of Norway. This might have been a comfort to Raeder . - A short time later the big gate of the Spandau prison was closed upon him.

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"I am doing well", says prisoner No. 4 of the Spandau War-Criminal Prison, Erich Raeder, any time he is allowed to receive a visitor, at intervals of two months. The visitor feels that the old man does not tell the truth. He looks grey and sunken. The conversation starts. Under the existing rule it lasts exactly 15 minutes. Any extension is dependent upon the good will of the directors. Between the visitor and the prisoner there is a double small-meshed wire nettingwhich divides the room in two equal parts. The prisoner is only vaguely recognized through it. The four prison directors, a Russian, an American, a British and a French officer, are present. Two of them are flanking the prisoner, the two others the visitor. Every word of the conversation is taken down in writing.

The visitor knows of what he is not permitted to speak and how he has to behave. They have instructed him beforehand. In addition there lies on the table a paper containing the rules which he has to observe. He must not give a sign to the prisoner either by mien or gestures, he must not use any foreign language, he must not speak about politics, thus it is laid down there amongst the many specified provisions. The visitor is very careful to comply with such provisions, in order not to run the risk of the conversation being cut short prematurely. Fifteen minutes is a short time, considering that it is available every eight weeks only, that for this purpose money had to be spent for a flight to Berlin and back, in order to avoid riding through the dangerous Sovietian Zone, that after full identification proceedings the visitor has to subject himself to a bodily search in a room adjacent to the guard-room, that all articles which he has upon himself had to be left back there and that, armed only with a slip of paper and a pencil, he had to go over the court-yard, through several doors and over a long corridor in order to stand at last in this room into which, after a brief teleconversation of an Allied officer on the other side of the double netting, the prisoner is led.

The 15 minutes are accurately meted out. Right in the course of the conversation one of the attending observers says: "Five minutes more". The visitor falters. Then he continues to speak in haste. A voice tells: "Three minutes more". Then it is over. - "Over", the voice says too. Thereupon no word is uttered any more. The prisoner gets up quickly and goes, in the midst of two guards, to the door, without looking back. The visitor sees only the big "4" on the back of the grey-brown jacket, which, it is said, is made of tearing material, so that it may not be used for suicidal attempts. Then he vanishes and will be allowed to enter this room, for another 15 minute

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For Erich Raeder, the 74-year old man, the life at Spandau must be particularly excruciating. His solitary cell is furnished with a table, a chair, a bed and a W.C. The two adjoining cells are empty. Behind them the prisoners number 3 and 5 are quartered. They should not have any opportunity to

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contact themselves by knocking. Between six and seven o'clock they are waked. After the room and the prison corridor in front of it have been cleaned, breakfast is taken in the cell, like all other meals. From eight to eleven o'clock the prisoners normally are working in the garden, likewise in the afternoon for two further hours. During work it is not permitted to speak. The prisoners have little opportunity at all to speak, for they have to spend mostly in their cells the time they are not working. There they may read and write letters, provided that their time and the prison rules allow it. The books are from the prison library. Prisoner No. 4 is for the most part engaged in theological studies, a branch which has interested already young captain Raeder. Any correspondence is subjected to particularly complicated rules. The prisoner is entitled to 1,200 words per month. They must be written in Roman characters on "DIN"- sheets (one-sidedly). The contents must be without suspicion. Censorship is exercised severely. Any kind of abbreviation and deviation from the normal writing is forbidden. Any abbreviated "and" or a German stroke over the Latin "u" is sufficient to set the scissors of the censor in motion and to have the whole sentence cut out by him. The handwriting of prisoner No.4 was recently objected to . Ever since he is doubly careful to write distinctly so that his letter reaches the addressee. It is not differently as regards the letters which the prisoners - likewise once a month - are allowed to receive from one of their relatives. The number of their words, too, is restricted. Their arrival is notified to the prisoners in every case. But between such notification and handing out there pass sometimes weeks during which the censor performs his duty.

Since Erich Raeder has entered, in autumn 1946, the Spandau Prison in the British Sector of Berlin he has not seen any human being to whom he could have spoken, except his fellow-prisoners, the guarding staff, the French prison parson and an American surgeon. The American surgeon operated him in May 1949 on account of hernia. He was a good surgeon and the operation was performed in a first-class manner. In the last time the old man is suffering from sciatica.

The professional soldier Raeder, who is convinced of his innocence, is still secretly hoping for a re-trial of his case. But he is prohibited to receive an attorney or to have correspondence with him. It is also prohibited to the man who is at death's door to speak to a German minister of religion. And the directors of the prison are very anxious to see to it that no rule is encroached upon. It has not become known so far who has issued this rule and to what agency the four directors on their part are responsible.

The Spandau Prison is probably the only place on the globe where nothing is known of the division of the world. It is true, however, that the prisoner become aware of it when the chairmanship in the management of the prison is taken over by the Russians. This is the case every fourth month. Then food is sometimes so scarce that the succeeding American finds it rather difficult to feed up the prisoners. That is why the prisoners fear the "Russian month". During this month the harsh conditions are enforced even more strictly than usually. Due to the light control, effected every 15 minutes, the relief has been cancelled which temporarily was granted in that the electrical bulb at the ceiling was darkened by a blanket. Then the cold light blinds every 15 minutes the eyes of the sleeping men, until the morning light falls through the cell window. For more than four years the old man Erich Raeder was not able to sleep undisturbed.

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The seven prisoners of Spandau have been sentenced by the International Military Tribunal to imprisonment. But they are living the existence of penal-servitude prisoners. Raeder is the oldest one amongst them. Apart from the half-blind Baron of Neurath he suffers most from the physically and psychically harsh conditions of life. He must suffer most therefrom, for the chances to see freedom once again are slightest for the almost 75-year old man, unless a re-trial of his case will take place within a short time. The brilliant career of a talented officer will then come to an end in a small cell behind the grey walls of the Spandau prison guarded in a hundredfold way by four nations.

The family of the one-time commander-in-chief of the German navy had no military tradition. Father Hans Raeder was assistant master at a secondary school (Studienrat) at Wandsbeck when, on 24 April 1878, his son Erich was born. He was going to find his tutorial pleasure in him, for Erich was what is designated amongst teachers as an "unusually talented" boy. But intelligence was obviously in the tradition of the family. Father Raeder took out his degree as doctor of philosophy at the Kiel university when being already at an advanced age and doing it in order to acquire the qualification for becoming director of the semi-classical secondary school at Grünberg in Silesia. At that time the son was attending already t Mathias Claudius secondary school at Wandsbeck, not anticipating in any way that the same university would some forty years later bestow on him the doctor's degree, just sought by his father, and would do it honoris causa on account of a two-volume work dealing with the cruisers' war during the first world war.

Erich passed the leaving examination at the Grünberg first-grade secondary school with distinction. Then the sea wooted him. As an imperial midshipman he saw the world for the first time on two trips to West India. He spent the turn of the century at Kiel as lieutenant in the navy. Two years before he had passed the officer's examination just as easily as the leaving examination at school. But lieutenant Raeder was good not only in examinations. He excelled also in service. Soon he attracted the attention of his superiors, and the efficient son of a teacher at a secondary school quickly climbed the ladder of success. Flag-lieutenant with Prince Heinrich on the "Deutschland", he was promoted at an early time to the rank of lieutenant -captain and received a two-year commission in East Asia. Later he spent one half-year each at Petersburg and Moscow, so that after English, French and Spanish he learned also the Russian language.

The climax of his peace-time career was certainly his post as officer in command of the imperial yacht "Hohenzollern". From this time originated Raeder's personal relationship with Wilhelm II who until his death congratulated every year his former navigation officer on his birthday by autograph letter.

The first world war saw lieutenant-commander Raeder as first naval staff officer and later chief of staff with Admiral Hipper. In the battle of Jütland he earned the "Hohenzollern" decoration. Then he took over the cruiser "Köln."

No wonder that after the November revolution the Chief of the Admiralty, Admiral von Trhotha, engaged such a man of mark as Raeder for the pocket navy of the Republic. There his advancement was not so rapid but continued in a more steady way: Navy Archives, Chief of Trainingand Educational Matters, Chief of the Baltic Naval Base. And eventually, on 1st October 1928, the 52-year old man obtained the highest postwhich the navy had to assign. He became Chief of the Admiralty, the title of which post has later been changed into "Commander-in-Chief ofthe Navy".

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Hitler never meddled in any noticeable way with matters of the navy which he understood even less than matters of leadership in the army. This was the reason why the service relationship between him and Raeder was relatively untroubled.

The first argument with Hitler was of little consequence. Hitler wanted to have a grand-admiral as Wilhelm had had one. Raeder took fright at it.

The only grand-admiral on record up to that time had been Tirpitz. He had created the impressive imperial navy. He, Raeder, however, had under his command a navy which possessed some armoured ships and destroyers and an incipient submarine arm. He refused. But Hitler was insistent in wanting the promotion. Then Raeder found a way out of the difficulty. He suggested a new service rank which formerly was known inthe Russian navy. Hitler promoted him to the rank of Admiral-General. The ensigns at the naval college thereupon used to call their commander-in-chief "Mampe" = half and half - . But the modest Raeder did not manage to evade the grand admiral. Two years later Hitler handed him in the, artistically made, admiral's baton, sown with nationality marks of gold and with iron crosses on a blue velvet-ground. It was until the year 1943 that the grand-admiral bore this baton as Commander-in-Chief. Then came the serious quarrel with Hitler on account of the so-called Arctic-Ocean battle, Raeder took the consequences. He left it to Hitler to choose a youngerman. On his part he had suggested Admiral Carls as his successor. But Hitler was primarily interested in submarine warfare. Dönitz came, and Raeder was discharged with the honorary title of Inspector General of the Navy.

The departure of the grand admiral might not have been unpleasant to Hitler. Raeder was considered to be a pious man. He was a regular churchgoer, and also in the navy he took care of regular religious services. But after final victory Hitler would not tolerate any churchgoers in his armed forces.

When the Russians had conquered Berlin, they arrested the Grand Admiral at his Babelsberg residence. Together with his wife he was taken to Moscow where the couple was accommodated in a small villa at the outskirts ofthe city. At that time there were persistent rumours that Raeder would reorganise the Red army. They ceased when the stocky man with his smooth dark hair, parted in the middle, emerged in the dock at Nuremberg behind Göring.

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The prisoner No. 4 at Spandau knows nothing of the speech held by Lord Hankey on 5 May 1949 in the British House of Lords. There the Englishman said: " Contrary to the prevailing opinion the historic facts on which the Nuremberg verdict and its premises are based are not exact. I have made a careful comparison between the Norway campaign as it is represented in the Nuremberg verdict and the description of the action as it may be found in Mr.Churchill's memoirs. Certainly, at that time these memoirs had not yet been published. But it would have been possible to procure the evidence necessary if the court had considered it worthwhile to procure them.

Instead the verdict was based on the evidence given by the Germans. They were not, however, informed about what was going on in Allied countries. If the judges had demanded those documents to be submitted, they should have discovered thatthe planning of the aggression was started in this country (England It was on 29 September 1939 - four days before Admiral Raeder's memorandum which is always called the first step in the German plans - that Mr. Churchill ordered such plan to be worked out in this country.

In view of all the facts here available it is impossible to accept the inferences drawn by the court that the invasion of Denmark and Norway was no defensive but aggressive action." "If the judges had procured those documents the verdict would have been different."

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The prisoner No. 4 knows nothing at all, for he is closed hermetically in the prison and separated from the outer world. But he expects that justice will be done to him. Justice, as he understands it, without a political background. Perhaps he expects only the generosity of the victors who might relieve his existence for the few years which he has still to live, and who may allow him to speak whenever he wishes, to write letters without restriction, to receive food parcels so that he has not to be hungry in the "Russian month", and who could grant him an undisturbed night rest, without the tormenting light control every fifteen minutes. In short, they could, so long as they do not authorize a re-trial of his case, treat him as "well" as a man who has been sentenced to imprisonment, and not more severely than a man sentenced to hard labour.

The prisoner No. 4 knows that one day he will be vindicated. He hopes that he will live to see it. And even if it should happen one day before his death.

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